

April 13, 2005

Forest Supervisor Gloria Brown
Los Padres National Forest
6755 Hollister Avenue, Suite 150
Goleta, CA 93117

Dear Forest Supervisor Brown:

It is our understanding that the Forest Service is preparing to release the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that will determine if additional lands on the Los Padres National Forest may be made available for future oil and gas leasing activity.

As part of this study started in 1995 directed by Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987 (FOOGLRA), the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared by the Forest Service identified approximately 140,000 acres as being High Oil and Gas Potential Areas (HOGPA). As I have discussed previously with Regional Forester Blackwell, the State of California is concerned that more than 100,000 acres identified as HOGPA are within inventoried roadless areas within the Los Padres National Forest.

The DEIS considers a range of alternatives, from no leasing of lands in the Los Padres National Forest to leasing lands under standard leasing terms with no protective stipulations. Although we understand your legal obligations under NEPA to consider such a range of alternatives, please be aware that the Forest Service is not free to adopt one of the less protective alternatives with respect to inventoried roadless areas. In a letter dated January 27, 2005, from Jack Blackwell, the Regional Forester, the U.S. Forest Service committed to standards that would prohibit construction of roads in roadless areas in California under most circumstances. This commitment precludes the Forest Service from adopting an alternative that would allow any road construction in such areas of the Los Padres National Forest for oil exploration and development.

Moreover, in the January 27th letter, Regional Forester Blackwell stated his intent to develop a final roadless rule that protects roadless values "in a fashion that meets the State's goals for the protection of wild areas in California." To be consistent with the spirit of this letter, the Forest Service should adopt the alternative at Los Padres National Forest that is most protective of inventoried roadless areas. Specifically, the Forest Service should insure that the inventoried roadless areas are not subject to leasing, or at a minimum, are given the protection of a No Surface Occupancy stipulation.

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California strongly believes that roadless areas in forest lands in California should remain roadless for the many public benefits they provide. These include wildlife habitat, water quality, open space and recreational opportunities. The Los Padres National Forest is home to a variety of sensitive species populations as well as providing a wide variety of recreation resources that is immediately accessible one of the largest urban population centers in the nation.

In light of the inherent environmental risks that oil and gas exploration and development present, and given the Forest Service's commitment to keep roadless areas in California roadless, we strongly urge you to ensure that the federal government selects the most protective alternative in the FEIS for inventoried roadless areas and prohibits any disturbance of inventoried roadless areas within the Los Padres National Forest.

I appreciate your consideration of our views as the Forest Service prepares to make a final determination on this matter.

Sincerely,



Mike Chrisman
Secretary for Resources

cc. Jack Blackwell, Regional Supervisor